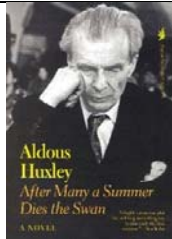




Australian Academy of Science

Ian Potter House, Gordon Street, Canberra ACT 2601

Annual Fellows' Christmas Reading List 2017

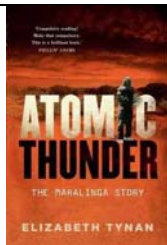


After Many a Summer

Aldous Huxley

Recommended by: **Professor Tony Basten**

This is vintage Huxley from the 1930s when he was living in California, a cynical and witty commentary on American society and mores of those days. What I really liked about the book was that it could equally have been set in Trump's America of today. Moreover, it contains a wonderfully quirky quasi-scientific scenario in which the intestinal microbiota are posited as the solution to the aging process, once again very topical!

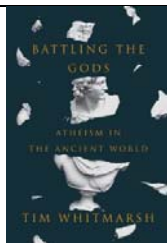


Atomic Thunder, The Maralinga Story

Elizabeth Tynan

Recommended by: **Professor Helene Marsh**

This book demonstrates the devastating consequences that can happen when politicians are ignorant about science and Australia has limited scientific capacity in a key field of research. In 1950, Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies blithely agreed to atomic tests in Australia and relinquished control over them to Britain. The book was awarded the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences' (CHASS) 2017 Australia Book Prize and is currently short-listed for the Prime Minister's History Prize.



Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World

Tim Whitmarsh

Recommended by: **Professor Howard Wiseman**

Whitmarsh makes a strong case that atheism was a persistent thread in the diverse philosophical thought of ancient Greece and Rome. Non-believers sometimes suffered persecution (Whitmarsh counts Socrates amongst these), and were all but written out of history by the Christian victors of late Antiquity. But the current dominance of monotheistic religions is the real historical anomaly.

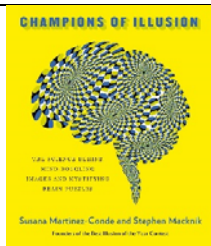


Black Mirror (Netflix series)

Charlie Brooker (most episodes)

Recommended by: **Emeritus Professor Michael Hynes**

A streaming TV series instead of a book because some of the images have remained with me. Very black imagining of the future with the implications of new technologies. Examples:- reconstruction of a dead loved one by using their on-line profile and soldiers with implanted chips so that they kill a targeted racial minority.

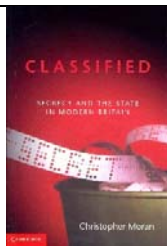


Champions of Illusion: The Science Behind Mind-Boggling Images and Mystifying Brain Puzzles

Susana Martinez-Conde & Stephen Macknik

Recommended by: **Professor John A. Endler**

This is a fascinating book about optical illusions, but unlike most other books on the subject, it also gives the neurobiological and/or perceptual reasons behind the illusions. This makes it especially interesting.



Classified: Secrets and the State in Modern Britain

Christopher Moran

Recommended by: **Professor Michael Dopita**

The issue of the balance of secrecy and openness in a Democracy is a problem which Britain has sometimes hilariously failed to deal with. Moran examines the history of the D-notice vs. Chapman Pincher, the Buster Crabb and the Russians fiasco, the publication of the Crossman Diaries and many other gems throughout the 20th century. We learn that when ex-ministers and mandarins choose to diarise, secrets inevitably reach the public domain albeit after valiant rearguard actions by government.

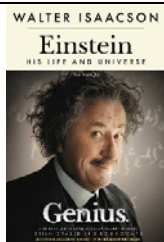


Cold Light

Frank Moorhouse

Recommended by: **Professor Wendy Hoy**

The essence of the fledgling Canberra, its institutions and personalities; issues of gender and identity and empathy for the human condition; superbly intelligent and insightful.

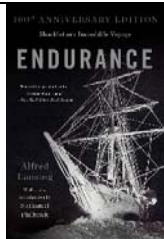


Einstein - His Life and Universe

Walter Isaacson

Recommended by: **Professor Harry Poulos**

Isaacson is one of the world's leading biographers, and in this book, he sets out, in detail, both the personal life of Einstein and the development of his scientific contributions. This is a landmark book which can be enjoyed by both those with a background in the physical sciences, and by the layperson. For those that find this book as enthralling as I did, then Isaacson's biography of Steve Jobs should be a follow-up.

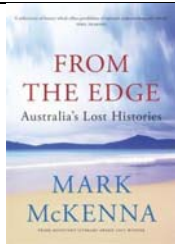


Endurance

Alfred Lansing

Recommended by: **Professor Nalini Joshi**

This book is an amazing account of adventure, survival, superhuman persistence, which I could not put down. It is based on diaries from members of Sir Ernest Shackleton's expedition to Antarctica in 1914. No amount of anticipation will prepare you for this story.

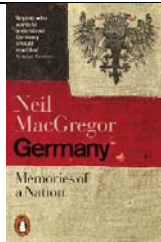


From the Edge: Australia's Lost Histories

Mark McKenna

Recommended by: **Professor Susanne von Caemmerer**

This winner of the 2012 Prime Minister's Literary Award is a product of an ARC funded project but still a very readable account of four different stories of early encounters between European settlers and Aboriginal people. I thought these stories brought a new perspective to our colonial past. They seemed to provide an honest and respectful understanding of these sometimes brutal interactions, while managing to maintain a positive outlook.

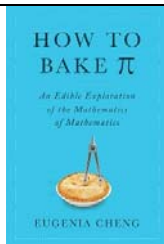


Germany: Memories of a Nation

Neil MacGregor

Recommended by: **Professor Jeremy Mould**

German history is unlike any other. Uniquely for any European country, no coherent, over-arching narrative can be constructed for it; the jigsaw pieces, as Neil MacGregor argues in his enthralling new book, do not fit together - not least because they are so often found in cities which are no longer German. Königsberg, home to Immanuel Kant and later to the seminal German painter and printmaker Käthe Kollwitz, is now Kaliningrad, Russia



How to Bake Pi

Eugenia Cheng

Recommended by: **Emeritus Professor Ross Street**

Eugenia provides a lesson to mathematicians on how to expose the beauty and excitement of their subject to those who think mathematics is what they learnt in school. To others it would be fun to read with many surprises as to where maths delves. I also recommend the CBS (USA television) segment (5 Nov 2015) of the author on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" and might mention that I like the way her latest book "Beyond Infinity" starts.



It's Alive: Artificial Intelligence from the Logic Piano to Killer Robots

Professor Toby Walsh FAA

Recommended by: **Professor Toby Walsh**

There are few other human inventions that are likely to have as large an impact on our lives as machines that can think. The steam engine liberated our muscles; the computer is set to liberate our minds. Leading researcher Toby Walsh takes us on a surprising and inspiring journey through the story of Artificial Intelligence - revealing how it is already transforming our societies, our economies and even ourselves - and makes ten fascinating predictions about what it will have achieved by the year 2050.

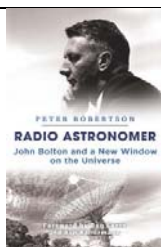


Ostende 1936, Sommer der Freundschaft

Volker Weidemann

Recommended by: **Dr Oliver Mayo**

The book gives a brilliant insight into one effect of the rise of the Nazis to hideous power in Central Europe in the 1930s: the forced exile of so many of the leading writers of the time. They were not all Jewish; Thomas Mann is the most prominent example. However, many were, and quite a few in the circle of Stefan Zweig and Jacob Roth came together in the Belgian seaside in the summer of 1936, in a curious parody of a beach holiday.



Radio Astronomer: John Bolton and a New Window on the Universe

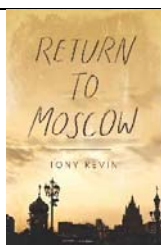
Peter Robertson

Recommended by: **Professor Robyn Williams**

He should have received a Nobel Prize; he established a new field of science from a shed up from Bondi Beach, and he was played in the movie by Sam Neill. This book reminds you of all the superstars of Oz physics you may have forgotten. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

Recommended by: **Professor Joss Bland-Hawthorn**

Remarkably, the full history of radio astronomy has played out over the last 80 years, and there are people alive today who remember most of it. This is the thoroughly captivating story of John Bolton's career in Australia, USA and UK, including his involvement in the discovery of quasars, the cosmic microwave background, and the drama around Steady State vs. Big Bang theory, and the Apollo 11 recordings. It's a tremendous read.

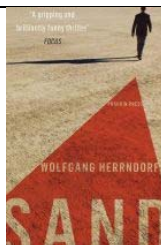


Return to Moscow

Tony Kevin

Recommended by: **Professor Allen Kerr**

Kevin is the only person I've heard who defends Russia. This is an honest book about modern Russia. The last paragraphs are particularly interesting.

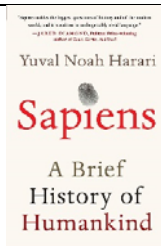


Sand

Wolfgang Herrndorf

Recommended by: **Professor Bryan Williams**

This is an engrossing read by an author who was suffering from an incurable brain tumour when he completed the novel. It is a thriller, a conundrum and a comedy of circumstances. The concise chapters are headed by quotes from a wide array of literary figures that entice the reader to make the connection.



Sapiens - A Brief History of Humankind

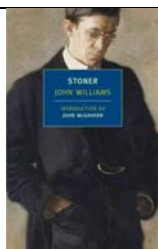
Yuval Noah Harari

Recommended by: **Professor Boris Martinac**

A quote from the product description: "In Sapiens, Dr Yuval Noah Harari spans the whole of human history, from the very first humans to walk the earth to the radical - and sometimes devastating - breakthroughs of the Cognitive, Agricultural and Scientific Revolutions. Drawing on insights from biology, anthropology, palaeontology and economics, he explores how the currents of history have shaped our human societies, the animals and plants around us, and even our personalities. Have we become happier as history has unfolded? Can we ever free our behaviour from the heritage of our ancestors? And what, if anything, can we do to influence the course of the centuries to come?"

Recommended by: **Professor Geoff Fincher**

How did we make it this far? We, Homo sapiens rule the world because we are the only animal that believes in the power of imagination.



Stoner

John Williams

Recommended by: **Emeritus Professor Neville Nicholls**

According to *The New Yorker* this 1965 novel of academic life is "the greatest American novel you've never heard of." Initially selling few copies, it was reissued in 2006 to critical acclaim and greater success. It follows the life of William Stoner, a farm boy turned English professor, and is simultaneously depressing and uplifting, and beautifully written by Williams, himself an English professor.

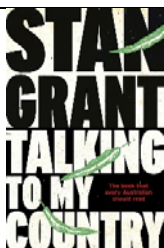


Street of Eternal Happiness

Rob Schmitz

Recommended by: **Professor Andrew Holmes**

Fascinating insight into life in Shanghai in modern-day China.

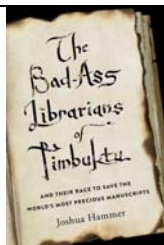


Talking to my Country

Stan Grant

Recommended by: **Emeritus Professor Cheryl Praeger**

The book is Stan Grant's "personal meditation on race, identity and history" that "talks to every Australian about their country - what it is, what it could be". As an indigenous Australian with many years of experience as a journalist in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa, Stan Grant has a unique perspective on Australia. I found the book powerful, confronting, and moving; I couldn't put it down.

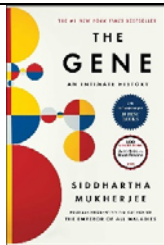


The Bad Ass Librarians of Timbuktu

Joshua Hammer

Recommended by: **Professor Georgia Chenevix-Trench**

This is the most fascinating book I've read about Africa in a long time. I knew that there were a lot of important ancient manuscripts in Timbuktu, but I had no idea of the scale, breadth and age of them. The first part of the book describes one man's attempt to recover 1000s of them from outlying districts, and the rest the race to save them from Al Qaeda, including shipping them down river on pirogues to Djenné to be picked up by a fleet of taxis and re-hidden in Bamako.

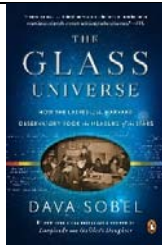


The Gene: An Intimate History

Siddhartha Mukherjee

Recommended by: **Professor David Black**

This is the story of the quest to decipher the master code that makes and defines humans, and that governs our form and function. It is very readable and interesting, despite a weakness to understand the underlying chemistry involved in the genetic code.



The Glass Universe
Dava Sobel

Recommended by: **Professor Brian Schmidt**

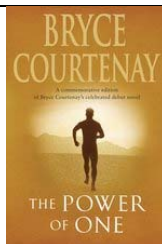
For a brief period in time (circa 1900) and space (North East USA) women were allowed to become full fledged astronomers, and they made remarkable discoveries. This is the story of the women (and men who supported them) who created a data driven field of astronomy more than 100 years before it has re-emerged as a hot topic. Beautifully written, it is simultaneously an inspiring and depressing chronicle of the rise and ebb of female empowerment within science.



The Great Mystery Science: God and the Human Quest for Meaning
Alistair McGrath

Recommended by: **Professor Graeme Clark**

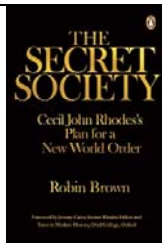
There is currently huge interest in the question of human nature and identity, and what the human future might look like. Who are we? Why are we here? What is our future? Are we alone? And what can religion bring, alongside biology and anthropology, to these important and exciting questions?



The Power of One
Bryce Courtenay

Recommended by: **Professor Louise Ryan**

This book has been around a while, but I only read it this year. It is a wonderful coming of age story that leaves you feeling inspired to seek truth and find your destiny. Set in South Africa, it also challenges ones thinking about prejudice.



The Secret Society
Robin Brown

Recommended by: **Professor Bryan Williams**

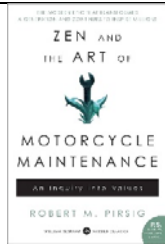
To quote the subtitle of the book; "Cecil John Rhodes's plan for a new world order. This is a "must read" for any of our fellows who may have been the recipient of a Rhodes Fellowship. It is also very relevant to understanding the present changing situation in Zimbabwe, the ongoing problems in South Africa and the legacy of a society that has long outlived its founder.



The Siege
Arturo Pérez-Reverte

Recommended by: **Professor David Black**

During the siege of Cadiz in 1811, a serial killer is on the loose, and in order to find the murderer the police commissioner perceives the city as a vast chessboard trying to predict his unknown opponent's next deadly move. Any novel by this author can be recommended, and the translations from Spanish are excellent.



**Zen and the Art of Motorcycle
Maintenance**
Robert Pirsig

Recommended by: **Professor Igor Bray**

The book looks at the concept of quality. It uses the background of a father and son reconnecting on a motorcycle trip across the USA. Along the way questions are posed such as what is a university, and can quality even be defined.